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A TRIP WITH LINCOLN, CHASE AND STANTON.

THE alternate clouds and sunshine that followed each other in such quick succession in the atmosphere of the national capital during the progress of the civil war brought upon those at the head of affairs an intense mental strain which few among the people realized at the time. The hopes that were born of victory were rapidly replaced by the despair that came with defeat, until the hearts of those whose faith was the firmest grew faint amid the dread uncertainties of the future.

One of those dark periods was that which followed the conviction that the "change of base" had failed to accomplish the magnificent results that were so enthusiastically anticipated. At this emergency it was decided in cabinet council that the President, the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Treasury should proceed to the seat of active operations on the Peninsula in order to gain from personal observation a better knowledge of the situation.

For obvious reasons the departure of the President from Washington at such a moment and for such a purpose was kept a profound secret; and when, without any previous intimation, I was requested by the Secretary of War, late in the afternoon of the 4th of May, 1862, to meet him within an hour at the Navy-yard, with the somewhat mysterious caution to speak to no one of my movements, I had no conception whatever of the purpose or intention of the meeting. It was quite dark when I arrived there simultaneously with the Secretary, who, after exchanging a few words with me, led the way through the inclosure to the wharf on the Potomac, to which a steamer was moored that proved to be the revenue cutter *Miami*. We went on board and proceeded at once to the cabin, where, to my surprise, I found the President and Mr. Chase, who had preceded us. The vessel immediately got under way and steamed down the Potomac. The *Miami* was one of the finest models and most neatly appointed vessels ever owned by the government, and was of about five hundred tons burden. She was originally an English yacht, named the *Lady Murchard*, built for his own use by a wealthy gentleman who came out in her to Canada, and afterward sold her to the Treasury Department for a revenue cutter, her name being changed by the Secretary. Her armament was four brass howitzers, two on each side, and a pivot rifled gun in the bow, besides which the sailors were all armed with carbines and cutlasses. The cabin was neat and cozy. A center table, buffet and wash-stand, with four berths, two on each side, and some comfortable chairs, constituted its chief appointments. A shaded lamp suspended from the ceiling threw a cheerful light over the table, upon which a tempting supper was spread. Mr. Chase was the host. He had brought with him his own butler, a most accomplished man in his vocation. Throughout the trip Mr. Chase displayed that thorough knowledge of the *convenances* of life, and of those social amenities for which he was at all times, and under all circumstances, eminently distinguished. He seemed to feel that we were his guests, as the steamer belonged to the Treasury Department, and he treated us as if we were in his own house. Had he been more cordial he would have been less dignified, and had he been more dignified he would have been less cordial.

After supper the table was cleared, and the remainder of the evening was spent in a general review of the situation which lasted long into the night. The positions of the different armies in the field, the last reports from their several commanders, the probabilities and possibilities as they appeared to each member of the group, together with many other topics, relevant and irrelevant, were discussed, interspersed with the usual number of anecdotes from the never-failing supply with which the President's mind was stored. It was a most interesting study to see these men relieved for the moment from the surroundings of their onerous official duties. The President, of course, was the center of the group,—kind, genial, thoughtful, tender-hearted, magnanimous Abraham Lincoln! It was difficult to know him without knowing him intimately, for he was as guileless and single-hearted as a child; and no man ever knew him intimately who did not recognize and admire his great abilities, both natural and acquired, his large-heartedness and sincerity of purpose. With a mind well stored with the grandest and most beautiful in English literature, and

a memory so wonderful that he could repeat, almost word for word, whatever he had read, he would sit for hours during the trip repeating the finest passages of Shakspere's best plays, page after page of Browning and whole cantos of Byron. He was as familiar with *belles lettres* as many men who make much more pretension to "culture." His inexhaustible stock of anecdotes gave to superficial minds the impression that he was not a thoughtful and reflecting man, whereas the fact was directly the reverse. These anecdotes formed no more a part of Mr. Lincoln's mind than a smile forms a part of the face. They came unbidden and like a forced smile were often employed to conceal a depth of anxiety in his own heart and to dissipate the care that weighed upon the minds of his associates. Both Mr. Chase and Mr. Stanton were under great depression of spirits when we started, and Mr. Chase remarked with a good deal of seriousness that he had forgotten to write a very important letter before leaving. It was too late to remedy the omission, and Mr. Lincoln at once drove the thought of it from his mind by telling him that a man was sometimes lucky in forgetting to write a letter, for he seldom knew what it contained until it appeared again some day to confront him with an indiscreet word or expression; and then he told a humorous story of a sad catastrophe that happened in a family, which was ascribed to something that came in a letter,—a catastrophe so far beyond the region of possibility that it set us all laughing, and Mr. Chase lost his anxious look. That reminded Mr. Stanton of the dilemma he had been placed in just before leaving, by the receipt of a telegram from General Mitchell, who was in Northern Alabama. The telegram was indistinct and could not be clearly understood; there was no time to ask for further explanation, and yet an immediate answer was required; so the Secretary took the chances and answered back: "All right; go ahead." "Now, Mr. President," said he, "if I have made a mistake I must ask you to countermand my instruction." "I suppose you meant," said Mr. Lincoln, "that it was all right if it was good for him, and all wrong if it was not. That reminds me," said he, "of a story about a horse that was sold at the cross-roads near where I once lived. The horse was supposed to be fast, and quite a number of people were present at the time appointed for the sale. A small boy was employed to ride the horse backward and forward to exhibit his points. One of the would-be buyers followed the boy down the road and asked him confidentially if the horse had a splint. 'Well, mister,' said the boy, 'if it's good for him he has got it, but if it isn't good for him he hasn't.' And that's the position," said the President, "you seem to have left General Mitchell in. Well, Stanton, I guess he'll come out right; but at any rate you can't help him now."

In marked contrast to the bonhommie and frankness of the President was the reserve of Mr. Chase. Not more firm, perhaps, in his convictions than Mr. Lincoln, he was more decided in his expression of them. At the same time, he was so well poised in his whole organization that it was only in times of absolute emergency that the true force of his character exhibited itself. He was pre-eminently an "intellectual observer," and never lost an opportunity to store his mind, from a close observation of current events, with the great truths that affect the interests of humanity. This made him a radical in politics and a leader in public affairs. It was difficult for him to follow the lead of anybody. Looking into the future with its possible complications, he was always in advance of public opinion, and so was not always understood.

The Secretary of War was, unlike either Mr. Lincoln or Mr. Chase, remarkably compact in both his physical and mental organization, reticent to an extreme degree, accepting responsibilities with unhesitating confidence, and executing the dictates of instantaneous impressions with a boldness and a vigor that amazed the timid and astonished his most trusted confidants. He courted antagonism with a spirit of uncompromising defiance, and outwardly seemed callous to every emotion of sympathy or tenderness. Yet no man ever lived whose heart was more sensitive or more gentle in its impulses. It must be said, however, of Mr. Stanton that he was a man of unusually strong prejudices. It was very evident at this time that he had conceived an absolute and unconquerable aversion to General McClellan. This feeling had been encouraged and fostered in the mind of the Secretary by persons of equal, if not greater, prejudices, until it had become one of real bitterness, and he disliked even to hear McClellan's name mentioned pleasantly. The feeling was not shared by either the President or Mr. Chase; nevertheless, it was plain that the Secretary had determined upon a course of action that boded no good results to the commander

of the Army of the Potomac, and subsequent events soon confirmed this impression.

Shortly after our departure a drizzling rain set in, and we had not proceeded many miles down the river when the night became so thick and dark that the pilot found great difficulty in discerning the proper course, and the captain decided that it would be most prudent to come to an anchor, and wait for the weather to clear. The driving rain outside only served to make our little cabin seem more cozy, and the small hours of morning came before there was any disposition to retire. Before going to bed, one matter was decided upon which the sequel proved to be of very great importance. The conversation had naturally turned upon our destination and the objects of this official expedition. Neither the President nor either of the Secretaries had ever been at Fortress Monroe, and the conceptions they had formed of its location and topographical surroundings were quite inaccurate. While we were examining the maps of Virginia, I pointed out what I regarded as a feasible route to the rear of Norfolk from a point near Linn Haven Bay, opposite Fortress Monroe. I had been anxious that we should attempt this route while our expedition to Port Royal was lying rather listlessly at Hampton Roads in 1861, awaiting the completion of some minor details. We had nearly 20,000 men on board the transports at that time, destined for a descent on the Southern coast, and we could have readily struck the blow and re-embarked during the time we were lying there idle in the ships. In war, as in commerce, it is always best to turn your capital rapidly, before your stock spoils on your hands, and this *coup de guerre* would have been most excellent practice for our troops, while, the force being an overwhelming one, success was assured in advance. It was not so decided, however; but I had not lost sight of what appeared to me to be a weak point in the defense of Norfolk. Mr. Chase, whose comprehensive mind was as fully alive to the military situation as it was assiduous in the administration of the national finances, was particularly impressed with the points that were presented, and through his urgency the President and the Secretary of War decided that, if there were troops at Fortress Monroe that could be spared, the movement should be made; and with that conclusion it was further decided to go to bed. The President's berth was on the same side of the cabin with mine, and he suggested that, as I had more room than I required and he had not enough, a movable partition would have been a great convenience; recommended that Mr. Chase should provide some arrangement of this kind, in case we took another such trip. General Scott, who was also very tall, suffered from the same inconvenience on shipboard; and when he went to Vera Cruz, during the Mexican war, he had two state-rooms thrown into one, in order to lengthen his berth. Mr. Lincoln always had a pleasant word to say the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning. He was always the first one to awake, although not the first to rise.

The day-time was spent principally upon the quarter-deck, and the President entertained us with numerous anecdotes and incidents of his life, of the most interesting character. Speaking of the practice that grew up in the beginning of the war, for everybody that found himself in command at a cross-roads—or any other place, no matter how insignificant—to issue a grandiloquent proclamation to the inhabitants, defining the position of the government, and more particularly expressing his own views upon the situation, etc., Mr. Lincoln remarked that he had been so much annoyed by these manifestoes that he had determined to put a stop to them. The first occasion that offered itself was when Burnside and Goldsborough appeared at the Executive Mansion to receive their final instructions in regard to the joint military and naval expedition to North Carolina. He called their attention to this subject, expressing very decided opinions in the matter. "Would you believe it?" said Mr. Lincoln; "when I spoke of proclamations, each pulled one out of his pocket that had been prepared in advance, without consultation. I had no idea of catching them in the very act!"

Few were aware of the physical strength possessed by Mr. Lincoln. In muscular power he was one in a thousand. One morning, while we were sitting on deck, he saw an ax in a socket on the bulwarks, and taking it up, held it at arm's length at the extremity of the helve with his thumb and forefinger, continuing to hold it there for a number of minutes. The most powerful sailors on board tried in vain to imitate him. Mr. Lincoln said he could do this when he was eighteen years of age, and had never seen a day since that time when he could not. It occurred to me, when reading the details of the plot that terminated in the death of the President, that his abduction, which was at one time proposed

by the conspirators, would have resulted very disastrously to those who should have the temerity to undertake it. The plan proposed was to waylay the President at night during one of his frequent visits to the War Department, where he was in the habit of going to read the telegraphic dispatches during the time of important military movements, and where he would often remain until a very late hour, returning alone through the grounds of the White House. A half-dozen men were to seize and carry him off; but, had they attempted it, they would probably have found that they had met their match, for he had the strength of a giant. Judge Swett, of Chicago, who was an intimate friend of his, says that he has seen him dash into a crowd where two powerful men were fighting, and, taking each by the collar, hold them out at arm's length, in the most helpless and ridiculous position. Lincoln's familiar campaign *sobriquet* of "Rail-splitter" was undoubtedly well earned in his youth, and in this athletic occupation he probably had no rivals. The necessities of his early life imbued him with that self-reliance that became a part of his very nature, and exhibited itself on all occasions. He never liked to be waited upon, or to ask any one to do anything for him that he could possibly do himself. This showed itself on one occasion, when, being struck with an amusing rhyme which I showed to him in a number of "Harper's Weekly," instead of requesting me to cut it out for him, he borrowed my knife, and, extending himself at half length on the deck, spread the paper before him and cut the piece out, remarking at the same time that it was not precisely the attitude for the President of the United States to assume, but it was a good position for a man who merely wanted to cut a piece out of a newspaper. This little scrap amused him exceedingly. It was a very absurd idea, absurdly expressed; but there was something about it that pleased his fancy, and he was not satisfied until he had read it to each one of the party, appearing to enjoy it the more the oftener he read it. He even called up the captain of the cutter and read it to him. This friendly spirit on the part of the President made the captain think that he ought to reciprocate the courtesy; so on one occasion, when we were all sitting on the quarter-deck, the captain undertook to contribute some rather uninteresting personal reminiscences, that had no point whatever to them,—in fact, they merely related to the various positions he had held in the mercantile marine, and the amount of wages he had received from the different parties that had employed him, with various other insignificant items of information of no interest except to himself,—when the President, who, in spite of his uniform good-nature, began to feel extremely bored, suggested by way of checking the captain's loquacity, that he, too, had been something of a sailor, and would give a little of his experience in that capacity. Whereupon he gave us his own version of an incident in his life that I have since heard repeated with a very different significance.

"When I was a young man," said Mr. Lincoln, "about eighteen years of age, I was living in Kentucky, and, like everybody else in that part of the country at that time, I was obliged to struggle pretty hard for a living. I had been at work all winter helping a man distill a quantity of whisky, and as there was little or no money in the country, I was obliged to take the pay for my winter's services in whisky." Turning to Mr. Chase with a quizzical look, he added: "You were not around in those days, Chase, with your greenback printing-machine. Whisky," he continued, "was more plentiful than almost anything else, and I determined, if possible, to find a market for my share in some other locality, so as to get the largest amount possible for my winter's work. Hearing that a man living a short distance up the Ohio River was building a flat-boat to send to New Orleans as soon as the water in the river was at a proper stage, I paid him a visit and made an agreement with him that if he would take my whisky to that city I would go with him and work my passage. Before the boat was completed and ready to start, I made up my mind that I should find a good deal of whisky in New Orleans when I arrived there, and having found a man who had a lot of tobacco that he was sending to market, I made a trade with him for half of my whisky, so that if whisky should be down when I got there, tobacco might be up, or *vice versa;* at any rate, I should not have all my eggs in the same basket. The boat was ready at the proper time, and stopped at our landing for me and my whisky and tobacco. My short experience as a sailor began from that moment. Our voyage down the river was not attended by much excitement or any catastrophe. Floating with the current during the day, we always tied up to a tree on the bank of the river

UNITED STATES REVENUE STEAMER "MIAMI," 1862.

at night. One evening, just after we had tied up the flat-boat, two men came down to the shore and asked me what I would charge them to row them out in the small-boat that we had with us into the middle of the river to meet a steamboat that was coming up the river, and on which they wanted to take passage. I told them I thought it would be worth a shilling apiece, and the bargain was made. I pulled out into the stream and delivered them safe on board the steamer, and, to my astonishment, received for my services a dollar. It was the first money I had had for some time. On my way back to the flat-boat, I made a calculation to myself that I had been gone about an hour, and that if I could earn a dollar every hour and live long enough, I would be a rich man before I died." Here Mr. Lincoln's story ended. The captain, whose curiosity had been somewhat excited, inquired how the whisky and tobacco sold in New Orleans; but the President, with a peculiar twinkle in his eye, replied: "Captain, I was only relating to you my experience as a marine, not as a merchant," which hint the captain had the good sense to understand. Lincoln did not refer to the subject again, and I never knew the result of his rather shrewd commercial venture. In the admirable oration on the life of Lincoln, delivered by Mr. Bancroft before the two houses of Congress, he alluded to this incident as the beginning of the President's career,—"commencing life as a flat-boatman on the Mississippi," etc.; but I think Mr. Bancroft was somewhat in error in his conclusions. Mr. Lincoln was never a "flat-boatman." Flat-boatmen are a peculiar class in the West,—rough, uncouth, almost uncivilized, they are unlike any other class of laborers, and lead a reckless, "devil-may-care" sort of existence. I went up the Mississippi on one occasion when a lot of men from the Wabash were returning home from a flat-boat service down the river, and although I have been four years among the Indian tribes, I never saw or heard anything more like savage life than these young fellows exhibited. Mr. Lincoln was not like one of these; and to compare a man of earnest purpose working his way from a youth of privation and penury to the head of a great nation, making the means that presented themselves secure the ends he sought, adapting himself to the situation with a skill akin to genius,—to compare such a man with a class of mere physical toilers is a great error.

Physically, as every one knows, Mr. Lincoln was not a prepossessing man, with scarcely a redeeming feature, save his benignant eye, which was the very symbol of human kindness. "If I have one vice," he said to me one morning,—"and I can call it nothing else,—it is not to be able to say no! Thank God," he continued, "for not making me a woman, but if He had, I suppose He would have made me just as ugly as He did, and no one would ever have tempted me. It was only the other day, a poor parson whom I knew some years ago in Joliet, came to the White House with a sad story of his poverty and his large family,—poor parsons seem always to have large families,—and he wanted me to do something for him. I knew very well that I could do nothing for him, and yet I couldn't bear to tell him so, and so I said I would see what I could do. The very next day the man came back for the office which he said that I had promised him,—which was not true, but he seemed really to believe it. Of course there was nothing left for me to do except to get him a place through one of the Secretaries. But if I had done my duty, I should have said 'no' in the beginning."

It was late in the evening when we arrived at Fortress Monroe. The outlines of the grand old fortress were dimly visible along the horizon as we approached, and around and about it in the adjacent waters was a cordon of floating videttes, whose thousand lights glimmered like stars in the mirrored surface. Ocean steamers, river steamers, sloops, transports, brigs, canal-boats, harbor tugs, men-of-war, gun-boats, monitors, iron-plated batteries, with countless smaller craft of almost every description, were congregated here, evidently for some great purpose, and towering above them all was the *Vanderbilt*, that leviathan of ocean steamers, a million-dollar gift by the owner to the government.

Answering the hail of the guard-boats we made a landing, and the Secretary of War immediately dispatched a messenger for General Wool, the commander of the fort; on whose arrival it was decided to consult at once with Admiral Goldsborough, the commander of the fleet, whose flag-ship, the *Minnesota*, a superb model of naval architecture, lay a short distance off the shore. The result of this conference was a plan to get up an engagement the next day between the *Merrimac* and the *Monitor*, so that during the fight, the *Vanderbilt*, which had been immensely strengthened for the purpose, might put on all steam and run her down. Accordingly the next morning, the President and party went over to the Rip Raps to see the naval combat. The *Merrimac* moved out of the mouth of the Elizabeth River, quietly and steadily, just as she had come out only a few weeks before when she had sunk the *Congress*. She wore an air of defiance and determination even at that distance. The *Monitor* moved up and waited for her. All the other vessels got out of the way to give the *Vanderbilt* and the *Minnesota* room to bear down upon the rebel terror in their might, as soon as she should clear the coast line. It was a calm Sabbath morning and the air was still and tranquil. Suddenly the stillness was broken by the cannon from the vessels and the great guns from the Rip Raps that filled the air with sulphurous smoke and a terrific noise that reverberated from the fortress and the opposite shore like thunder. The firing was maintained for several hours, but all to no purpose; the *Merrimac* moved sullenly back to her position. It was determined that night that on the following day vigorous offensive operations should be undertaken. The whole available naval force was to bombard Sewall's Point, and under cover of the bombardment, the available troops from Fortress Monroe were to be landed at that point and march on Norfolk. Accordingly, the next morning, a tremendous cannonading of Sewall's Point took place. The wooden sheds at that place were set on fire and the battery was silenced. The *Merrimac*, coated with mail and lying low in the water, looked on but took no part. Night came and the cannonading ceased. It was so evident that the *Merrimac* intended to act only on the defensive, and that so long as she remained where she was, no troops could be landed in that vicinity, that they were ordered to disembark, somewhat like the King of Yvetot who—

> "called his fighting-men.
> And marched a league from home, and then
> Marched back again."

It may here be remarked that all this fiasco had been clearly foreseen by more than one of our party. But the proposition to make a landing at Pleasure Point, discussed on the *Miami* on our way down, had been met by the assertion from at least two of General Wool's staff-officers that such a thing was utterly impossible. One of them had said there was no such place, and the other had asserted positively of his own knowledge that the water was shoal for more than a mile

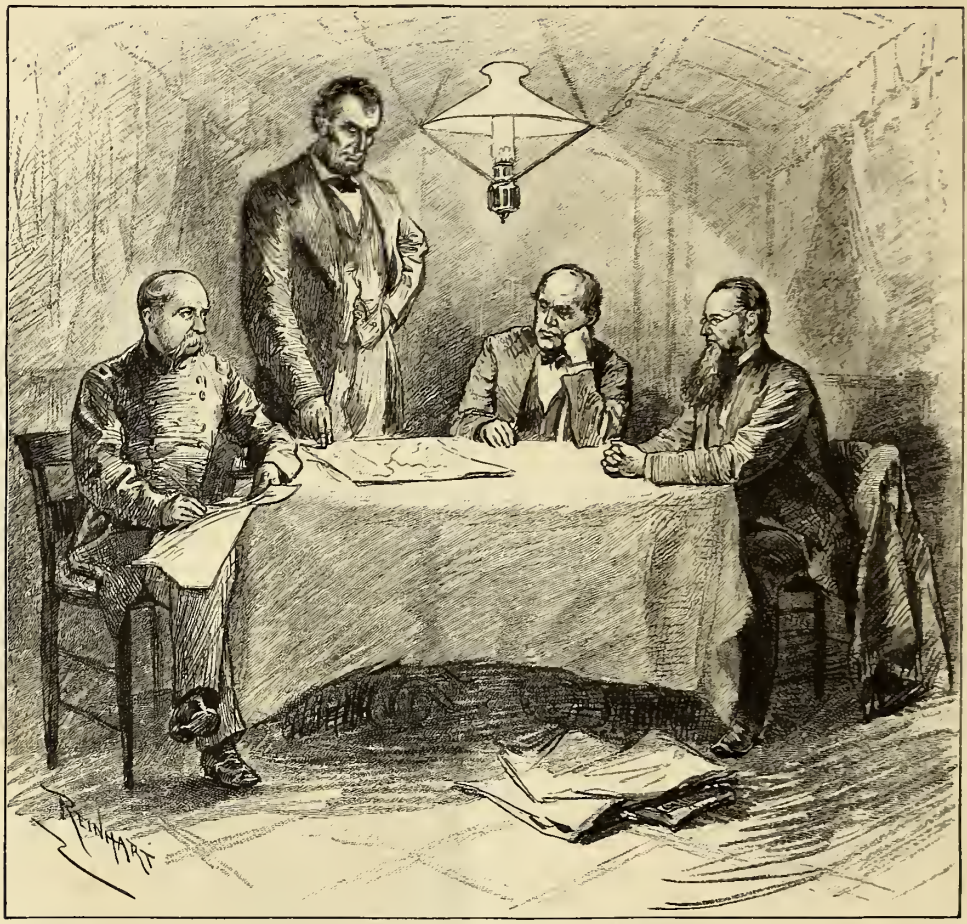
from shore, being but between three and five feet deep, that troops could not possibly be landed there, and that any attempt to do so would prove an utter failure. For these reasons, so decidedly and authoritatively put forth, the plan which had been determined upon the first evening of our trip had been set aside for the one that had thus been brought to a most ridiculous termination.

The failure of the proposed attack upon Sewall's Point and the disembarkation of the troops that had been hastily crowded into everything in the way of a transport that could be made available was not a very inspiriting spectacle, and no one felt the mortification of the occasion so much as Secretary Chase. He was so keenly alive to the necessities of the hour, and so sensitive to the least thing that savored of defeat that he fairly chafed under a sense of disappointment as he saw the disembarking troops. Turning to me, he said, "Let us take our *man-of-war* (the *Miami)* and reconnoiter the place you suggested for a landing." Of course I was gratified at the proposition, and we started at once. General Wool was sitting at the door of his quarters as we passed, and learning our design, volunteered to accompany us, and sent his orderly for the very officer (Colonel Cram) who had pronounced the plan impracticable. The *Miami* was soon under way, accompanied by a small tug. As Colonel Cram still insisted upon it that we would get aground if we attempted to approach the shore in so large a vessel, we anchored in six fathoms of water and betook ourselves to the tug, which was in its turn anchored at quite a distance from the shore. A row-boat was quickly manned with armed sailors, and in this Colonel Cram, with another officer, undertook a closer reconnoissance, but returned in great haste before they were half way to the land, with a breathless account of a large body of men on shore. While they were recounting their narrow escape, Mr. Chase was watching the shore with a powerful field-glass, with the hope of discovering the force that had so alarmed the reconnoitering officer. Instead of defiant warriors he saw some people waving a white sheet as a flag of truce; a longer scrutiny revealed a white woman, a negress and child and a dog, as the sole cause of the colonel's terror, and he was therefore instructed to return to the shore with the crew, while Mr. Chase and myself followed in another boat. The result of all this was the demonstration that this was not only an available, but a most admirable, landing-place, with depth of water sufficient for the largest transport to approach to within a few feet of the shore; yet these officers had been stationed at Fortress Monroe a whole year! On our return Secretary Chase reported the result of our reconnoissance to the President, who was so much astonished that he insisted upon going in person that very night to verify the fact. Accordingly, with the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Treasury, he went over on the *Miami* to the Virginia shore, and by the light of the moon landed on the beach and walked up and down a considerable distance to assure himself that there could be no mistake in the matter. How little the Confederacy dreamed what a visitor it had that night to the "sacred soil"!

No time was lost on the following morning in re-embarking the troops for the purpose of marching on Norfolk by the rear. At the last moment General Wool, with much emotion, begged the Secretary to allow him to command the troops. The Secretary had decided to relieve him of the command of the expedition on account of his advanced age, but finally reversed his decision with the remark that he could not inflict sorrow upon gray hairs. And here I must let Mr. Chase tell the story in one of his printed letters:

"The next morning (yesterday) I was up early. We breakfasted at six o'clock, and got away as promptly as possible. When we reached the place selected for the landing, we found that a considerable body of troops had already gone forward. I then took the tug and went along the shore to the point where the President's boat had attempted to land the evening before, and found it only about three-quarters of a mile distant. I then returned to the *Miami* and found that the General had gone ashore. I followed, and on the shore met General Viele. He asked me if I would like a horse. I said that I would; and he directed one to be brought to me, and I was soon mounted. I then proposed to ride up to the place where the pickets had been seen the night before. General Viele agreed, and we were not long in getting up as far as I had been with the tug, and even some distance beyond. We found a shed where a picket had stayed the night before, and found fresh horse-tracks in many places, showing plainly that the enemy had withdrawn but a few hours previously. Returning, I made report to General Wool. Meantime, Mr. Stanton had come, and he asked me to go on with the expedition, which I finally determined to do. I accordingly asked General Wool for a squad of dragoons, and for permission to ride on with General Viele ahead of him, following the advance which had already been gone some three or four hours. He acceded to both requests, and we went on; that is, General Viele, myself, and a half-dozen dragoons."

Starting at once to the front with our escort, we had not gone very far before it



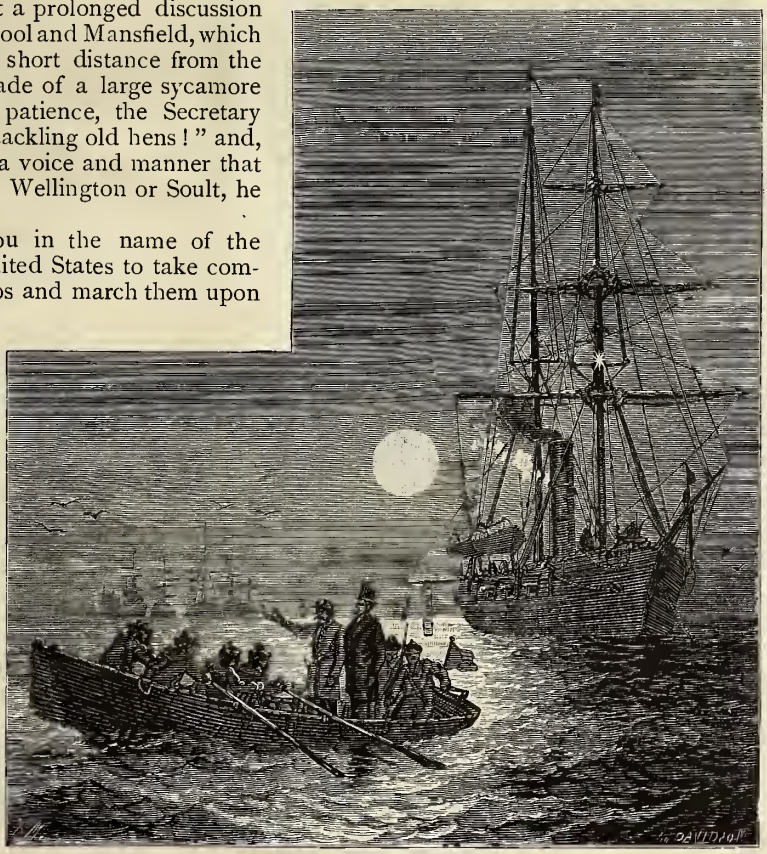
A COUNCIL IN THE CABIN OF THE "MIAMI."

became evident that a great deal of confusion existed in the command,—in fact, that there was no organization, and an utter absence of definite instructions or orders of any kind. Overtaking a regiment that was scattered along the road,—most of the men lying down wherever any shade could be found, as the day was intensely warm,—Mr. Chase inquired of the colonel to whose command he belonged and what his orders were. He replied that he had no idea who was his commander; that some said Weber and some said Mansfield. He had received no orders, except that when he landed he was told to take a certain road, and he thought he would wait to see what was to be done next. Overtaking another regiment, a mile or two beyond, the Secretary received the same answers. Going on still further, we came upon General Mansfield and his staff, who had dismounted in the shade, near a spring of cool water. Further still, another straggling regiment was found; yet no one had any orders or instructions. Suddenly the booming of cannon was heard immediately in front, and, as no artillery had been landed by us, it was evident that the firing proceeded from the enemy. Straggling soldiers now came running toward us, with exaggerated rumors of the enemy being in force, burning the bridges and contesting with artillery the passage of the streams that crossed the road. The ridiculousness of the situation would have been amusing, if it had not been for the serious aspect that it was gradually assuming. Two regiments of cavalry had been embarked, and two batteries of artillery; yet not a horse or a gun had been sent to the front. Four regiments of infantry were marching along, uncertain what road to take, and unassigned to any brigade; two brigadier-generals and their

staffs, without orders and without commands, were sitting by the road-side, waiting for something to turn up. This was the situation, with the enemy firing in front. Secretary Chase took it all in at a glance, and rose at once to the necessities of the occasion. Tearing some leaves from his memorandum-book, he directed me to send one of our escort back to General Wool with a written requisition for artillery and cavalry. This brought the general to the front with two pieces of artillery and some mounted troops. As he rode up, Mr. Chase expressed to him in very strong language his astonishment at the condition of things. General Wool replied by saying that he presumed General Mansfield had felt some delicacy in assuming command over General Weber, and that General Weber had hesitated to act while General Mansfield was so near. "Talk of delicacy," exclaimed the Secretary, "with the enemy firing in front! What absurdity! Let General Mansfield go to the rear and bring up re-enforcements, and that will settle all questions of delicacy." This brought about a prolonged discussion between Generals Wool and Mansfield, which was carried on at a short distance from the road, under the shade of a large sycamore tree. Losing all patience, the Secretary exclaimed: "Two cackling old hens!" and, turning to me with a voice and manner that would have become Wellington or Soult, he said:

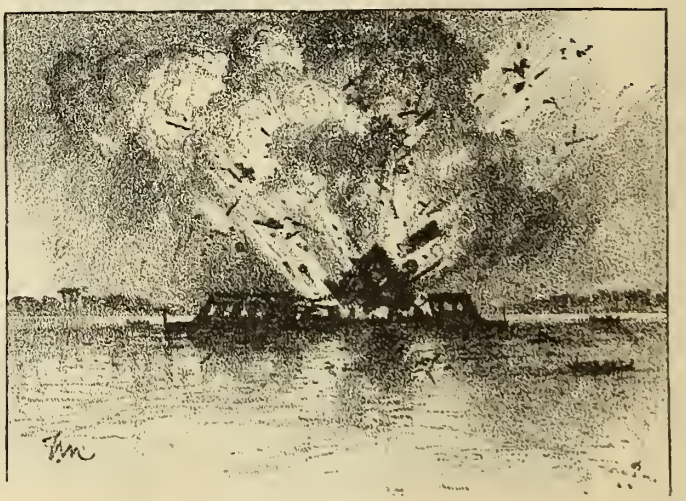
"Sir! I order you in the name of the President of the United States to take command of these troops and march them upon Norfolk."

An infantry regiment was deployed at double quick, as skirmishers in advance, and the other regiments were soon moving rapidly down the Norfolk road. They had proceeded some distance before General Wool was aware of the movement. He was not long in overtaking us, however, and on his demand for an explanation from me Mr. Chase assumed the responsibility, after which we proceeded harmoniously toward our destination. At the extreme limits of the city, and before the formidable line of intrenched works was reached, a large deputation, headed by the mayor and municipal councils, made its appearance with a flag of truce and performed a most skillful ruse to gain time for the Confederates to secure their retreat from the city. The mayor, with all the formality of a mediæval warden, appeared with a bunch of rusty keys and a formidable roll of papers, which he proceeded to read with the utmost deliberation previous to delivering the "keys of the city." The reading of the documents—which embraced a large portion of the history of Virginia, the causes that led to the war, the peculiar position of the good citizens of Norfolk, and in short a little of everything that could have the remotest bearing upon the subject and exhaust the longest possible space of time in reading—was protracted until nearly dark. In the



THE PRESIDENT'S RECONNOISSANCE.

meanwhile the Confederates were hurrying with their artillery and stores over the ferry to Portsmouth, cutting the water-pipes and flooding the public buildings, setting fire to the navy yard, and having their own way generally, while our General was listening in the most innocent and complacent manner to the long rigmarole so ingeniously prepared by the mayor and skillfully interlarded with fulsome personal eulogium upon himself. Losing all patience, Mr. Chase at last interposed and suggested that any further parley was unnecessary, and that we should proceed to the city. And now another well-devised plan presented itself in the shape of a number of carriages which the mayor particularly desired should be used by the officers in taking possession of the city, the troops in the meanwhile to remain where they were. Falling readily into this second little trap, the General accepted, and we were driven to the city hall, where some more rusty keys were produced and more formal speeches were made. A collection of several thousand people, some of them in butternut and gray, assembled in front of the building. While the General and the mayor were going through their high formalities, Mr. Chase asked for a pen and a piece of paper, and wrote an order assigning the command of the city to myself as military governor, which General Wool signed at his direction. Then, bidding me good-bye, he took the General by the arm and departed, leaving me the solitary occupant of the city hall, without a soldier within two miles, and with not even an aide-de-camp to assist me. The situation appeared somewhat critical. A noisy mob surrounded the building, some of the more excitable exhibiting a sort of bravado by firing pistols in the air. It was fast growing dark, although the surrounding heavens reflected the glare from the burning navy-yard. The probable return of the *Merrimac* to a position off the city would certainly complicate matters most disagreeably, so that it became a question of no little moment to occupy with troops, as speedily as possible, the opposite side of the river, to prevent supplies from going to the *Merrimac*, and also to save the navy-yard from total destruction. Fortunately, an enterprising newspaper correspondent had followed the carriages on foot, and him I appointed an aide and dispatched for the troops. By the time the troops arrived the moon had risen, and by its light they were placed in position. A regiment dispatched to the navy-yard was too late to rescue it from almost complete destruction, but it cut off the *Merrimac* from any supplies from either side of the river. It was long after midnight before the final disposition of the troops was made, and this had hardly been accomplished when, with a shock that shook the city, and with an ominous sound that could not be mistaken, the magazine of the *Merrimac* was exploded, the vessel having been cut off from supplies and deserted by the crew, and thus this most formidable engine of destruction that had so long been a terror, not only to Hampton Roads, but to the Atlantic coast, went to her doom, a tragic and glorious finale to the trip of the *Miami*.



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE "MERRIMAC."